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### Sticky-Fingered Former Spook's Story Recounted

By the nature of their work, undercover agents are given wide latitude in the way they spend the money allotted for their operations. It's an open invitation to steal with little chance of getting caught.

This is the story of one sticky-fingered spook who responded to the invitation with a degree of greed that is impressive even in the world of clandestine double-dealing. He stole impartially from the U.S. government, from his associates and from the dictators with whom he did business.

The swindler is Edwin Wilson. He worked with another ex-CIA agent, Frank Terpil, who was convicted in absentia of illegal munitions dealings. Both are on the run after being indicted for illegal arms sales to Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi. Wilson is hiding out in Tripoli; at least he was until a couple of weeks ago.

By all accounts, Wilson is a shrewd, cold businessman who lets neither sentiment, patriotism nor simple morality stand in the way of a lucrative deal. When his mother died several years ago, he flew off to Libya on business the next day and missed her funeral.

In his years as a CIA contract agent, Wilson either resisted the

temptation to profiteer or was able to cover his tracks. He was involved in the Bay of Pigs fiasco, as well as the subsequent secret war against Fidel Castro, which included a cockamamie scheme to have trained dolphins attach explosive charges to Cuban ships.

It was when Wilson left the CIA that opportunity knocked. He joined the Navy's supersecret "Task Force 157," a group of about 75 agents who gathered intelligence around the world under the cover of export-import operations.

Wilson's assignment was to set up a "front" firm called Consultants International, through which agents would be run and supplied. It was a joint CIA-Navy operation: The Navy gave the orders, the CIA paid the rent.

Terpil told a confidant that Wilson made a fortune from Task Force 157. Wilson was the paymaster for his agents, Terpil explained, and would charge the government \$20,000 a head, but pay some agents as little as \$11,000 and pocket the difference.

Terpil also said Wilson once was given \$70,000 to buy a Soviet mine. But he never bought it, claiming that his contact had absconded with the money, or some such excuse.

Wilson also made a bundle from the then-shah of Iran through his CIA-Navy front. Sources told my associate Dale Van Atta that Wilson had particularly good contacts in Iran during the shah's regime, including members of the American group that advised the Iranians on military pur-

chases. Wilson had access to the "wish list" of equipment for Savak, the shah's dreaded secret police, and was once paid by a private contractor to eavesdrop electronically on meetings of Army supply officials at the Pentagon.

At one point, Wilson arranged — for a healthy commission — to have a fishing vessel, fitted with spy gear, constructed in Ireland for the Iranian Navy. The \$400,000 boat snapped its propeller en route to Iran and had to be towed to a South African port for repairs.

On another occasion, Wilson contracted with the Iranian military for 9 million pairs of socks, at \$3 a pair. He was paid in full but delivered only 100,000 pairs. He also sold the Iranians boots and barbed wire.

The full extent of Wilson's thievery may never be known, but he managed to acquire a 1,500-acre ranch and other properties worth millions of dollars, supposedly while working as a middle-level government employee.

Word of Wilson's depredations eventually reached Adm. Bobby R. Inman, now the No. 2 man at the CIA, who was in charge of Task Force 157. With the nerve of a burglar, Wilson offered to set up another, similar task force and said he'd help get the necessary funds from Congress if Inman would grease the skids for Wilson's own companies. The outraged admiral responded by having Wilson fired from Task Force 157. Soon after, Inman disbanded the group.